

The Current Status of the Soil Survey Investigations and Laboratory Staffs

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Objectives

1. Review “where we were” in 2005.
2. Compare with present.
3. Some speculation on future.



Investigations Staff

- Laboratory and Investigations staffs functioning as separate entities.
- Little interaction among Investigations staff and other staffs.
 - Every person for himself “bunker” mentality – little sense of institutional purpose.
 - Few linkages with scientists outside agency.
- No long-term vision or strategic plan for either group.
- Some internal competition for resources, and not everyone is a “shareholder.”
- In some cases, no sense of “serving the clientele.”



Investigations Staff

- Laboratory and Investigations staffs functioning as separate entities.

Encourage collaboration among technicians, with investigations staff as mentors.

Invite laboratory staff to seminars and field trips.

Restructure supervision so more time can be spent mentoring individual technicians.

Set common goals and standards for both staffs.



Investigations Staff

- Little interaction among Investigations staff and other staffs.
 - Every person for himself “bunker” mentality – little sense of institutional purpose.
 - Few linkages with scientists outside agency.

Remind staff of their purpose – to gather, analyze and interpret data to meet mission goals. “We are here to serve.”

Individual counseling. Eliminate perceptions of “favored” projects.

Develop true research collaborations with cooperators. (Watersheds, gypseous soils, Ksat, etc.)



Investigations Staff

No long-term vision or strategic plan for either group.

Develop visions – asked each individual to present his/hers.

Give group a sense of “ownership” and purpose.

Develop individual and group pride – keep them informed and solicit input.

Communicate mission goals.

Include goals in performance plans.



NSSC Laboratory Data Status

- Huge sample backlog.
- Technicians generally are “single technician/single analysis.”
- Some “project specific” technicians.
- Point data (single soil profiles).
- Mostly for soil characterization.
- No sense of urgency in analyses.
- Samples come in “from everywhere.”
- Priorities for analyses not clearly defined.
- Huge data base with unknown correlations
Data base never inventoried.



NSSC Laboratory Data Status

- Huge sample backlog.
- Technicians generally are “single technician/single analysis.
- Some “project specific” technicians.

Institute cross-training.

Educate about history of soil survey and clientele.

All projects have equal merit, some have more urgency in time.

Recognize excellent performance.

Mentor, mentor, mentor.



NSSC Laboratory Data Status

- Point data (single soil profiles).
Still an issue, but beginning to develop more holistic projects.
- Mostly for soil characterization.
Developing other projects – watersheds, gypsum,
- No sense of urgency in analyses.
Monthly reminders about goals and purposes.



NSSC Laboratory Data Status

- Samples come in “from everywhere.”

Developing “gateway” through State Soil Scientists.

Reviewing requests.

Analyses must be relevant to mission goals.



NSSC Laboratory Data Status

- Priorities for analyses not clearly



NSSC Laboratory Data Status

- Huge data base with unknown correlations
Data base never inventoried.

Remains a major issue -- will address in more detail in benchmark soils presentation.

Huge conundrum – “We are data rich and informati0n poor.”



Summary

- Major improvements in turn-around time.
- Great interest in training.
- Major improvements in “ownership” and pride.
- Investigations staff functioning more as a team.
- Looking for collaborations and developing them.

Trace and heavy metals

Gypsum

Watersheds

Other cooperator projects



Challenges

- What are roles in future soil survey?
 - Building relevant database
 - Role of NSSC and Investigations in MLRA focus
- Where is the next generation of technicians?
- Losing ability to go to field – understaffed and shifting emphasis.



My Observations

A need exists for very focused discussions on:
data
role of NSSC
needed expertise for future
priorities for future

“Institutional memory,” once lost, may never be regained.

